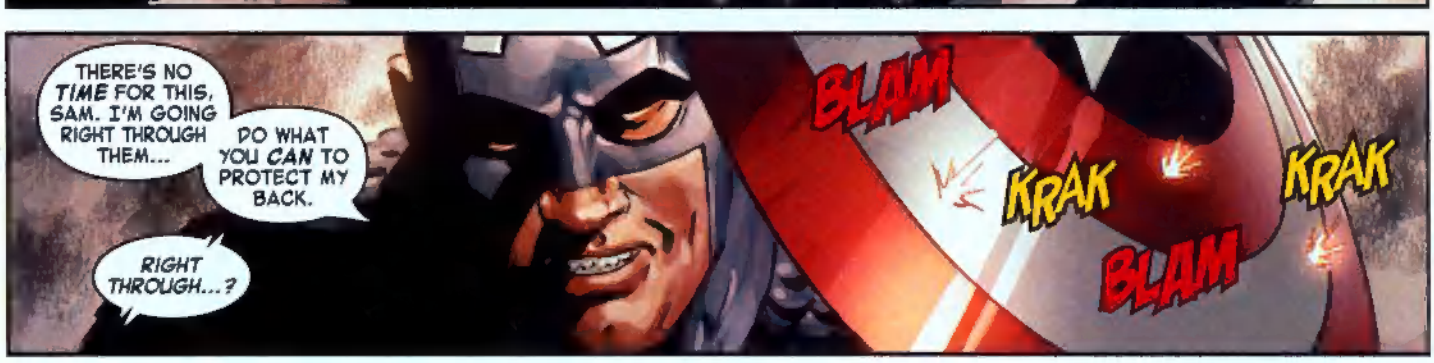
DIRECT HIT, CAP, BUT HE'S ON THE MOVE ALREADY.

THIS GUY IS GOOD.
I KNOW... BELIEVE ME.

AND HE'S GOT PLENTY OF BACKUP.


THERE'S NO TIME FOR THIS, SAM. I'M GOING RIGHT THROUGH THEM...
DO WHAT YOU CAN TO PROTECT MY BACK.
RIGHT THROUGH...?
BLAM
KRAK
BLAM
KRAK

STEVE, IT'S SHARON... ARE YOU IN YET?
YEAH. NO SIGN OF LUKIN SO FAR, BUT THE WINTER SOLDIER'S HERE. WHERE ARE YOU?
ABOUT TWO MINUTES OUT...LISTEN, I'VE BEEN SEARCHING THE SCHEMATICS FOR THAT PLACE.
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
THERE'S A NETWORK OF TUNNELS ACCESSIBLE NEAR THE SECURE VAULT DOWN BELOW.
LIK--
TUNNELS TO WHERE?
ALL THROUGH THIS MOUNTAIN RANGE.
IF YOU SCRUBBED HIS MISSION, HE'LL GO TO PLAN B, WHICH IS PROBABLY TO GET AWAY...WITH THE CUBE.
AND IF HE GETS DOWN THERE, HE'S GONE.
YOU HAVE TO STOP HIM HERE...OR WE'RE BACK TO SQUARE ONE.
NO... THERE'S NO GOING BACK NOW.
I'LL STOP HIM.
AGG--

NO, YOU WON'T.
KNNK
UNNH!
YOU'RE SOMETHING ELSE... I'LL GIVE YOU THAT.
BUT NO ONE STOPS ME.
YEAH, WELL... SOMEONE HAS TO.
AND I CAN'T FAIL YOU AGAIN...
KLNNG!

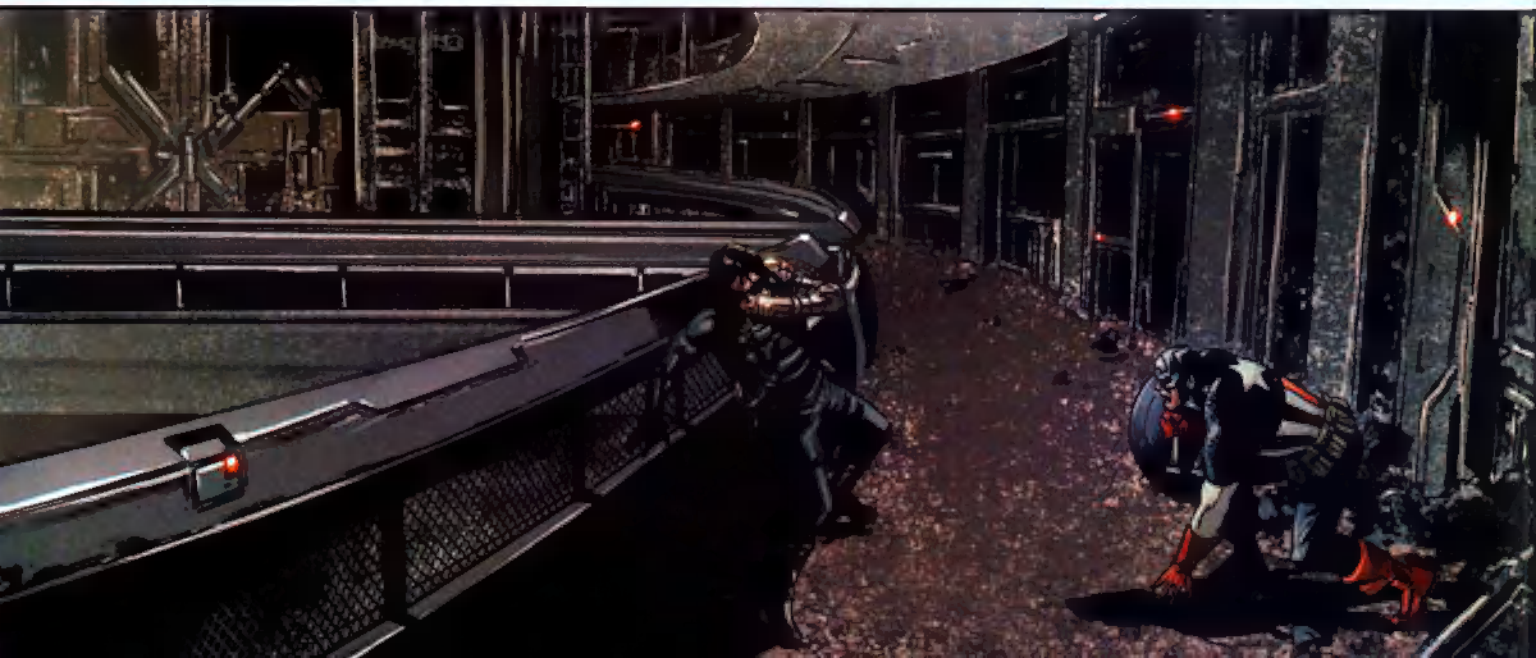
SMAK
EX-SPETSNAZ?
YOU GUYS AIN'T %#@!
GET HIM! TAKE HIM DOWN!
AW, DAMN...
RATATATATATATAT
SECURE THAT ENTRANCE, AND I WANT THREE OF YOU RUNNING A SWEEP INSIDE--NOW!
YES, MA'AM.

WELL, LOOK WHO THE CAVALRY IS...
SAM. IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
TOO LONG.
WISH WE HAD TIME TO CATCH UP. BUT...

I KNOW... I'LL SCOUT AHEAD.
WE'VE GOT TO FIND HIM.
HE CAN'T DO THIS ALONE, SAM...

UNH!

WNK
UPPT--



LOOK OUT! INCOMING!
DROP OFF, BUCKY! LET GO!
I CAN'T! I'M STUCK...
WELCOME TO FORT LEHIGH US ARMY
<YOU ARE MY FINEST CREATION, MY TWISTED JOKE ON THE AMERICANS...>
<LET US DRINK TO THEIR DEMISE.>

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Things have really picked up in the last few months. Since CAP #12 came out, we've gotten four or five times the mail we used to get on this book, and it's really gratifying. So, if your letter doesn't get printed, and there's no way we could print them all, please know that we do read and appreciate them. A reminder, we received several good letters that were simply too long to print, and too hard to edit down to size effectively, so please, try to keep your letters as short as possible while still making your points and asking your questions...On to the mail, starting with a Special Guest Star Supreme!

Today in the local comic book shop where I purchase the books, I stated aloud, "It's such a great feeling to be my age and be so truly excited about reading this. But I'm also a bit hesitant to read it, because I don't want this story to end!" I was referring to the current "Winter Soldier" saga so brilliantly produced by Ed Brubaker, Steve Epting and associates.

I've been reading comic books since I was a very young boy. I clearly remember buying AVENGERS # 4, off the rack at Super Drugs for twelve cents the day it came out. I still think that's one of the most powerful comic books ever created. CAPTAIN AMERICA COMICS # 1 Volume 1, the Golden Age original, is one of my most prized material possessions. I have almost always enjoyed following Captain America's adventures, but the storylines that have focused on Bucky over the years have been the ones that I've favored the most.

I've written scores of comic books myself, many for Marvel, and as an actor I've been a part of some impressive big-time showbiz entertainment all my life. A story this powerful and well done comes along very rarely. As an old fan of the characters, I just had to write and say thanks.

The late great Jack Kirby, co-creator of Cap and Bucky, was a friend of mine, and I believe Jack would have loved this story and the artwork. Keep up the excellent work.

Nuff said,
Bill Mumy
Los Angeles, CA

I tell you, folks, getting this letter forwarded was a real treat. I've been watching Bill Mumy on TV most of my life (and listening to him on radio sometimes, too), and to know that not only is he reading our Cap, but digging it this much was a huge deal. And that line about Kirby has made him my new best friend.

Bill, I was always a big fan of all the Bucky stories, too, especially as a kid, and I was always let down when it never turned out to actually be Bucky. So now, I get to make up for that by writing this book.

To be honest, I have never felt any affinity for Captain America, having lived on a tiny island called Singapore all my 35 years. Sure, there were a couple of great stories along the way, but if you were to talk about universal appeal, Spidey and Batman would be tops of mine. Until now, that is. I am struck by what an amazing story "The Winter Soldier" is turning out to be. I foresee this as becoming a major classic in the Captain America mythos, alongside the best of Gruenwald, DeMatteis, Waid, Lee and Kirby. I wait for each issue with bated breath and tear into each new one almost immediately. Epting's art just makes the entire package so much more elegant.

Some queries:

1) Will we see some more of the one or two-issue stories like the Nomad issue? Which do you prefer writing? Multi-issue trade-ready arcs or done in ones/twos?

2) Which actor would you choose to play Captain America in a big screen movie, budgets notwithstanding?

3) Will we get a chance to ever see Steve in a civilian job?

4) How about some guest artists from Captain America's past? I would love to see Mike Zeck, Ron Garney or Sal Buscema on art chores, perhaps for an anniversary issue? And speaking of that....

5) Any chance of CAPTAIN AMERICA reverting to its original numbering at issue #600? I believe that issue number should be approaching within the next year.

Leslie Lee
Singapore

Thanks for your kind words, Leslie. Let me get to your questions:

1) We'll see more shorter arcs coming up, sort of. What I like to write are stories that build on each other. Thinking about what the trades will collect often gets in the way of plotting out the stories, so I try not to.

2) I have no idea, honestly.

3) Maybe... maybe not.

4) I think we might, at some point. I know of a few great Cap artists I'd love to have for an issue or a short story.

5) I don't know. I guess we'll just have to see.

When I read that they were relaunching CAPTAIN AMERICA yet again, I was nonplussed. I knew the name Brubaker from Batman and had seen Epting's art and had been little impressed. So why the hell were they letting these guys have CAPTAIN AMERICA? The first issue had me asking more questions and by the end of the first story arc I was thoroughly impressed. This Brubaker can write. Epting's art seemed to be getting better every issue. Fairly soon CAPTAIN AMERICA became the book I had to read first. Now the team has created such a mood on the book that I can't be more pleased with it.

Brubaker has finally done what so many great comic writers before him have a hard time doing--making the continuity a positive instead of a negative. Instead of saying I have to throw away this, that and the other to do a story I want to do, you've dived into the rich history of the character and brought back a gem. The only thing I'm a bit troubled about is how you'd have Captain America letting a 16 year-old kid do all the killing and maiming of people as he looked away. Saying something to himself like, "well it has to be done." It was certainly the great war and ugly things needed to be done, but you made Cap seem like a coward, knowing what Bucky is doing but looking the other way because of his ideals. I know what you're trying to do but it just came off that way to me. At any rate it seems the Winter Soldier is going to be around for a while. I just hope the creative team sticks around too.

Jesse Ojeda
Clovis, CA

I don't know where you got the idea that Cap was "looking the other way" while Bucky was on recon missions during the war. And I never said Bucky did anything Cap himself wouldn't have done--they were soldiers in a war, they did what needed to be done, both of them. I was just trying to acknowledge that when Cap is being filmed for newsreels, sometimes there are things that need to be accomplished, and Bucky was the one to do them. It was about the Military's use of Cap as a propaganda tool, not about his ideals. And as for Bucky being 16, there were plenty of 16-year-olds fighting in WW2, so Bucky's age wouldn't have been that big a deal.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH: If you were a sidekick, what would you be called?

Ed Brubaker: Kid Nap-a-lot--and I'd always be sleeping when the red phone rings with the call for help, or deadlines...

Steve Epting: Ummm...the Pro-crastinator? I'll think about it tomorrow.

Frank D'Armata: THE TIME SAVER! I would always be the one to wrap up the heroics just before the explosive device goes off, but the hero would still get all the credit!

Aubrey Sitterson: Well, Tom always calls me "Shut-up Sitterson" so I guess that works. Or maybe "Get-your-finger-out-of-your-nose Aubrey."

Molly Lazer: Does the Living Laser need a sidekick? I wouldn't even have to change my name!

Andy Schmidt: Does the gig come with health insurance? Yes? Then call me whatever you want. [Ed's note – then the "Schmidt-head" it is!]

Tom Brevoort: Doesn't matter--just so long as I get to wear short pants and elven boots...

As you know, I've been the lone voice pleading for Bucky's reputation these last few months, expressing my hopes that somehow you've got something up your sleeve that will turn out to be clever while at the same time not violating the integrity of the red, white and blue sidekick. As of issue #12, things still looked grim but I think I've spotted a glimmer of hope in #11. In that issue, a clue was laid about the Cosmic Cube that could serve as a way out of the apparent dilemma in the Winter Soldier storyline. My guess is that the Cube has become sentient, and with self-awareness, has begun to manipulate events to its own end...which at this point seems to be to bring Cap and Gen. Lukin into collision. To wit: Bucky's apparent return is a contrivance of the Cube which will turn out to be either created from whole cloth (as the Cube can do) or some kind of time distortion in which Bucky never died. If so, this leaves you with an "out:" what the Cube can do, it can also undo. Of course one scenario would be completely unacceptable (to me, at least): that the Winter Soldier storyline is "real" and that setting things back to the status quo ante (ie accepted Marvel history in which Bucky died at the end of WWII) was a "false" past to ease Cap's conscience. If that were to be the case, that would still leave the Bucky in the Winter Soldier storyline as the "real" Bucky, something I don't want to see.

Pierre Comtois
Lowell, MA

Well, write in and tell us what you think now, Pierre... I hope you're still enjoying the ride, even though it really is Bucky, and he really is back.

I have enjoyed your run on CAPTAIN AMERICA so far, Mr. Brubaker. There is a sort of "Sleeper"-like sensibility that has permeated the title so far...that sense that no matter how these arcs end, they aren't going to end pretty for anyone. What is great about the story so far is that we see how this mission is really weighing on Cap. You have done a superb job of showing the gamut of emotions that Cap is feeling as he chases down Bucky.

Which leads me to my guess on how this story will end. Cap is going to want to "save" Bucky in whatever way possible. We have already seen how the Cosmic Cube is not a miracle machine, but more like a devil's promise...wishes fulfilled in damning ways. So Cap wrests the Cube from Bucky and then uses its power to wish that all the ills from his years as the Winter Soldier be undone. Of course, that would mean Bucky will have no arm and become the age of your typical WWII vet. In other words, Bucky ends up dying for real this time, and Cap wished him that way.

Oh, what a delicious twist against Cap that would be, layering all sorts of new guilt and frustration on him. Sounds like a Holden Carver ending if ever I heard one.

Andrew C.
Canton, MA

Well, you got close, Andrew, but you went off in a whole other more creepy direction than we did. For anyone wondering what Andrew is talking about, Sleeper was a book I did at another publisher for a few years, and fans of the espionage aspect of CAP would be wise to check it out.

That's all for this month. Join us next time for a wicked little story about the Red Skull's daughter and Crossbones.

Ed Brubaker

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